



“Dig In!” to Nutrition and Garden Education During the School Day

Intervention Summary

School garden-based nutrition education provides educators with a hands-on, interactive way to foster positive attitudes towards fresh fruits and vegetables amongst school children. *Dig In!* is a standards-based nutrition education curriculum created by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that takes students on an educational journey through the world of gardening and nutrition based on growing, harvesting, tasting, and learning activities.

In March 2015, 3rd and 4th graders at Monroe Elementary School in Riverside Unified School District began their three-month 10-session *Dig In!* journey. During the first few classes, students were introduced to MyPlate and started planting and observing the growth pattern of kale, radish and squash. To make the connection between gardening and healthy eating, the curriculum challenged students to consider elements that plants and people need to stay healthy and grow. For example, students were “a-mazed” (in Lesson 4) to see how plants followed light patterns in a maze they created inside of shoeboxes.

The culminating activity was a “Harvest Celebration”. Students used the foods grown from the garden to create a kale and radish salad. In groups of five, the students presented various topics to City of Riverside personnel, school staff and nutrition services administrators. For example, one group presented a skit on the importance of gardening while another group gave a PowerPoint presentation on healthy choices and another recited a poem they had written. The Harvest Celebration experience served to boost students’ level of excitement for gardening and healthy living. In addition, by taking care of the plants as they grew, students developed skills that increased their confidence to make progress towards their healthy living goals.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

A common challenge for implementing nutrition education during school hours is the competition of priorities for classroom minutes and varying levels of confidence (and interest) among teachers to implement nutrition and garden related curricula. In this project, the teachers were active partners in the implementation. The *Dig In!* curriculum afforded participating teachers the option to implement classroom-based nutrition education while meeting core education standards, helping to address their time limitations. By modeling the implementation of *Dig In!* educational materials, NEOP staff encouraged the participating teachers to increase their capacity and confidence to lead nutrition and gardening lessons in the future.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

The *Dig In!* curriculum functioned as a capacity building experience for teachers at Monroe Elementary School to get a taste of the benefits of incorporating nutrition education into the classroom. Follow-up steps are planned during the 2015-2016 school year to continue to build teachers' skill and confidence to lead classroom-based nutrition education. NEOP staff will join with the participating *Dig In!* teachers to train other Monroe Elementary teachers on how to integrate nutrition education into classroom-based garden-related activities. Also, Monroe Elementary teachers, local master gardeners, and NEOP staff will host a garden party during National Farm to School Month (October 2015) to continue promoting nutrition-infused garden education.

Contact information about this Narrative

Local Health Department Grant Name: County of Riverside Department of Public Health

Subcontractors: Riverside Unified School District and City of Riverside

Grant #: 13-20527

Author's Name: Morgan McGhee and Eddy Jara

Phone: (951) 352-6740; (951) 826-5813

Email: MMcGhee@rusd.k12.ca.us; ejara@riversideca.gov

This material was produced by the California Department of Public Health's Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Branch with funding from USDA SNAP-Ed, known in California as CalFresh. These institutions are equal opportunity providers and employers. CalFresh provides assistance to low-income households and can help buy nutritious food for better health. For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. For important nutrition information, visit www.CaChampionsForChange.net.